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Archaeology and the Interpretation of John's Gospel: A Review Essay

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The Gospel of John is at once the most influential and the most controversial writing in the New Testament. On one hand, its unique and profound theology has been decisive in shaping the church's understanding of the person of Jesus Christ. On the other, it has been accused more than any other Gospel of possessing no real value in the search for the historical Jesus. A number of archaeological discoveries, however, has called such a negative assessment into question. Though archaeology will never be able to prove the historicity of the particular events recorded in this Gospel, and much less to establish John's theological statements on the basis of verifiable data, some of its findings have thrown considerable light on the historical and cultural setting of the Gospel and, as such, have caused many scholars to rethink the way John's message should be interpreted. This is the subject of the present article, which is divided into three parts: part one synthesizes how the distinctive traits of John have been understood in modern times; part two reviews the most significant archaeological discoveries related to this Gospel; and part three describes the influence of such discoveries on current Johannine research. Due to the more informative nature of this essay, no extensive bibliography should be expected, neither a critical assessment of all the questions involved. Similarly, despite the major role played by archaeology and the Fourth Gospel itself in the so-called Third Quest for the

historical Jesus, also known as Jesus Research, no attempt is made to relate the discussion to specific issues of that quest.[1]

Modern Interpretation of John

All four Gospels in the New Testament tell the story of Jesus, but not the same way. Each evangelist presents a different portrait of Jesus.[2] However, the differences among the first three Gospel, which report a considerable amount of common traditions about Jesus, are not as significant as the differences between them and John. Though sharing the basic outline of Jesus' ministry, as well as some sayings and incidents, John places Jesus' ministry mostly in Judea, not in Galilee, reports at least three Passovers attended by Jesus in Jerusalem, instead of only one, and omits several important episodes of Jesus' life, such as his birth, baptism, transfiguration, exorcism of demons, and agony in Gethsemane. The last supper and the prophetic discourse are also missing. Another difference is the portrait of Jesus himself. Important emphases in John, such as Jesus' full divinity and

[1] The Third Quest is the study of the historical Jesus which began around 1980, following the old and the new quests. Both the Old Quest (1774-1906) and the New Quest (1953-1970) were clearly motivated by theological concerns. The Third Quest (Jesus Research), on the other hand, shifted the focus (and the method) completely. Led by a wide variety of experts, whether Christians or Jews, Catholics or Protestants, liberals or conservatives, it does not follow any theological agenda per se, but consists in a scientific study of Jesus against the Jewish background of his life and ministry, and in light of all relevant data. For the first time the study of texts, which include the Gospel of John with its remarkable historical, architectural, and topographical information, is assisted by a systematic examination of archaeology and topography. For a short introduction to the Third Quest, see Darrell L. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 141-152. More comprehensive guides include: Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998); Ekkehard Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century*, trans. O. C. Dean (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999); Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter, *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus: The Question of Criteria*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002). A helpful introductory discussion with detailed and up-to-date bibliographic information is found in James H. Charlesworth, *The Historical Jesus: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008).

[2] See esp. Richard A. Burridge, *Four Gospels, One Jesus?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994). For a more condensed discussion, see Richard A. Burridge and Graham Gould, *Jesus Now and Then* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 47-68.

pre-existence, are virtually absent from the Synoptics. The Johannine Jesus does not use parables or short sayings, but preferably long and thoughtful discourses. He is also constantly using words that are scarcely used in the other Gospels (e.g., love, to love, truth, true, to know, to work, world, to abide, to judge, to send, to witness) and likes speaking of himself metaphorically as the bread of heaven, the true vine, the good shepherd, the door, and the light of the world.[3] Most significant, however, are the miracles of Jesus, which in John seem to be more extraordinary than those reported by the other evangelists.[4] New Testament scholar Ernst Käsemann is correct when he says of the Fourth Gospel: "Judged by the modern concept of reality, our Gospel is more fantastic than any other writing of the New Testament."[5]

Until the mid-eighteenth century, such differences represented no problem for most Bible interpreters. Being the work of John, the beloved disciple and a leading figure in the apostolic church, it was generally thought that his account of Jesus was more personal and therefore more authoritative than the others'. Mark and Luke were not eyewitnesses of the events they recorded, and Matthew, though being one of the twelve, never achieved the prominence that John did. Taking John as the starting point, it was then possible to harmonize the Gospels and so to minimize their differences.[6] In 1776, however, J. J. Griesbach broke off from such an approach, contending that all four Gospels cannot be treated together. In his Synopsis of the Gospels, he ignored the Gospel of John almost completely and simply placed

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[3]A full list of vocabulary and other literary differences can be found in C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 5-9.

[4] For more details on the differences between John and the Synoptics, see D. Moody Smith, *John among the Gospels*, 2d ed. (Columbia: University of South Caroline Press, 2001), 1-11.

[5] Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17*, trans. Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 45.

[6] For examples spanning from Augustine to the time of Reformation, see Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Collection and Origin of the Canonical Gospels*, trans. John Bowden (Harrisburg: Trinity International, 2000), 22-24.

together the parallel accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke for the purpose of comparison.[7]

The separation of John's Gospel from the others was not in itself hermeneutically wrong, but once separated, its differences and peculiarities came to the fore right at a time when the Enlightenment was starting to impact biblical interpretation. For one thing, newer and more critical approaches to the Bible were felt necessary, particularly in relation to the use and handling of historical evidence, which were entirely distorted, to say the least, especially because of the old theory of verbal inspiration and inerrancy of every part of Scripture. For another thing, biblical interpretation was made hostage of a radical rationalism, that is, the rejection of any form of supernaturalism and the consequent abandonment of the very notion of inspiration itself, so that ultimately the Bible became nothing more than an ancient document to be studied as any other ancient document.[8]

As a result, the authenticity of John's Gospel came under heavy fire. In the eyes of rationalist Bible scholars, stories like the marriage-feast of Cana and the raising of Lazarus could not be true, implying that the fourth evangelist could not have been an eyewitness of the events he describes. One of the first attacks came already in 1792 by Edward Evanson, who referred to the miracle in Cana as "incredible" and "unworthy of belief." [9] If the Fourth Gospel was not history (biography) or an account historically reliable, what was it then? It did not take long for the alternatives to appear.

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[7] This is how the term "Synoptics" came to be used as a reference to those Gospels only. In New Testament studies, it conveys the idea that Matthew, Mark, and Luke can be arranged or viewed side by side, like in parallel columns, and be easily compared by means of a synopsis, as they report the same general outline for the story of Jesus. See esp. C. M. Tuckett, "Synoptic Problem," *ABD*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:263-270, and Robert H. Stein, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels: Origin and Interpretation*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 17-25.

[8] Griesbach himself operated from a historicist perspective, believing that "the New Testament must be explained as every ancient book is explained" (William Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, vol. 1, *From Deism to Tübingen* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992], 139. Cf. David Laird Dungan, *A History of the Synoptic Problem: The Canon, the Text, the Composition, and the Interpretation of the Gospels,* ABRL [New York: Doubleday, 1999], 309-326).

[9] See John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 15-16.

In 1835, D. F. Strauss introduced the term "myth" to describe the content of John; other terms that were used in the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth include "idea," "philosophy," "allegory," and "theology."[10] Whatever the term, the idea was the same: the Gospel of John was not the personal testimony of an eyewitness, the best loved of Jesus' disciples, and its account should not be taken historically. The modern mind could no longer accept at the mere historical level what was felt to be nothing else but the expression of a religious idea in concrete form by an ancient writer.

The notion that John's Gospel was not history but was written to convey a theological idea found a creative expression in F. C. Baur, in the mid-nineteenth century. For Baur, John was not an apostolic document, but a post-Pauline Christian reflection whose purpose was to promote the concept of a unified (Catholic) church. As such, it could not have been written before the second half of the second century, and, of course, was not historically reliable. "The Johannine Gospel," he said, "from beginning to end . . . has no concern for a purely historical account, but for the presentation of an idea which has run its ideal course in the march of events of the Gospel story."[11] Although Baur's positions were too artificial and exegetically indefensible, his influence on subsequent Johannine scholarship was remarkable. The so-called Tübingen school, of which he was the leading figure, dominated the scene for an entire generation.[12] At the turn of the twentieth century, only a few conservative interpreters still held the traditional view that this Gospel was the testimony John the son of Zebedee.[13]

Another blow against the historicity of John was struck with the arrival of the religio-historical school, in the late nineteenth century. Attempting to

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[10] Ibid., 36.

[11] Ferdinand C. Baur, *Kritische Untersuchungen über die kanonischen Evangelien: Ihr Verhältnis zueinander, ihren Charakter und Ursprung* (Tübingen: Fues, 1847), 239. See further, Peter C. Hodgson, *The Formation of Historical Theology: A Study of Ferdinand Christian Baur* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 212-213.

[12] As late as 1959, Johannes Munck would still regard the historical results of the Tübingen school as valid (*Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, trans. Frank Clarke [London: SCM, 1959], 69-70).

[13] On Strauss and Baur, who had been Strauss' teacher at two different establishments, see Werner Georg Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems*, trans. S. McLean Gilmour and Howard C. Kee (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), 120-161.

tie the rise and growth of all religions to purely naturalistic and historical causations, this school affirmed that Christianity was nothing more than one phenomenon among the many religious phenomena of the Hellenistic world. As such, John's theology and concepts were explained in the light of other contemporary religions, like mystery religions and Gnosticism. Still using the basic scheme provided by Baur, Otto Pfleiderer, the founder of the religio-historical school, maintained that the Gospel of John did not belong "to the historical books of primitive Christianity, but to its Hellenistic doctrinal writings."[14] The Johannine Logos, the light/darkness dualism, the descent/ascent motif, and the Greek term *kyrios* ("Lord") are only some examples of concepts which would have been assimilated when Christianity moved from Palestine and its Jewish environment to the broader Hellenistic world.[15]

These ideas were taken even further by Rudolf Bultmann in the first half of the twentieth century. Brilliant in his reasoning and consistent in the application of the historical-critical method, Bultmann's interpretation of John's Gospel was devastating: John's language, whenever it reflects supernatural categories, was entirely mythological;[16] it is not to be taken on the historical level as a source of information on the life and teaching of Jesus;[17] its conceptual world was not Jewish, but Gnostic; the Redeemer that

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[14] Otto Pfleiderer, *Primitive Christianity: Its Writings and Teachings in Their Historical Connection,* 4 vols., trans. W. Montgomery, (London: Williams & Norgate, 1906-1911), 4:2.

[15] For further information on the religio-historical school, see Kümmel, 206-280.

[16] According to Bultmann, "the cosmology of the New Testament is essentially mythical in character. The world is viewed as a three-storied structure, with the earth in the centre, the heaven above, and the underworld beneath. Heaven is the abode of God and of celestial beings—the angels. The underworld is hell, the place of torment. Even the earth is more than the scene of natural, everyday events, of the trivial round and common task. It is the scene of the supernatural activity of God and his angels on the one hand, and of Satan and his demons on the other. These supernatural forces intervene in the course of nature and in all that men think and will and do" (Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch, trans. Reginald H. Fuller, 2 vols. [London: SPCK, 1953-1962], 1:1).

[17]In his book *Jesus and the Word* (trans. L. P. Smith and E. H. Lantero [London: Scribner, 1958], which is a critical study of the Synoptics, Rudolf Bultmann specifically notes that "the Gospel of John cannot be taken into account at all as a source for the teaching of Jesus, and it is not referred to in this book" (17).

came from heaven was inspired by the Gnostic myth; the Gospel is not original, but a conflation of several previous documents; it was not written by a single author, but is the result of a composition process in which several editors or redactors were involved; the text as we have it does not make sense and so it needs to be reorganized; and to be understood, it needs to be demythologized by means of an existential interpretation.[18] In other words, almost nothing of the traditional understanding of John was left. Bultmann's radical criticism was so overwhelming that, for a while, it appeared the Gospel would never recover from it.[19]

It is true that not all of Bultmann's ideas gained universal acceptance, even among more radical Johannine scholarship.[20] It is also true that, despite all the challenges, several conservative scholars continued to maintain a more traditional view on John's authorship and date. But, in the first half of the twentieth century, there was a widespread consensus on at least three points: (1) that the fourth evangelist was not a direct eyewitness and therefore had to depend on sources; (2) that his background was not Jewish; and (3) that his Gospel was actually not about the historical Jesus but about the Christ of faith, that is, it is a theological expression of the church's faith late in the second century and read back into the life of Jesus.

But then things began to change, and archaeology played an important role in this change.

Archaeology and John's Gospel

The first archaeological discovery to impact the interpretation of John's Gospel was a small fragment of papyrus, known as Rylands Papyrus 457 and listed among the New Testament manuscripts as P52, measuring only 2

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[18] Rudolf Bultmann's main works on John's Gospel include "Untersuchungen zum Johannesevangelium," ZNW 27 (1928): 113-163; "The History of Religions Background of the Prologue to the Gospel of John," in *The Interpretation of John*, 2d ed., ed. John Ashton, SNTI (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 27-46; and *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971).

[19] Robert T. Fortna even speaks of a kind of "tacit moratorium" in Johannine studies which lasted for several years right after the Second World War as a result of Bultmann's theories (*The Gospel of Signs: A Reconstruction of the Narrative Source Underlying the Fourth Gospel* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970], 1, n.1).

[20] See D. Moody Smith, "Johannine Studies," in *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters*, ed. Eldon J. Epp and George W. MacRae (Atlanta: Scholars, 1989), 271-273.

½ by 3 ½ inches and containing a few verses from John 18: parts of vss. 31-33 on the recto, and of vss. 37-38 on the verso. Although it had been acquired in Egypt in 1920 by Bernard P. Grenfell for the John Rylands Library in Manchester, England, it was identified and published only in 1934, by C. H. Roberts. Using paleographical techniques, Roberts dated the fragment to the first half of the second century; most scholars argue for a date no later than A.D. 125.[21]

Despite its size, the significance of this papyrus for the interpretation of John cannot be overemphasized: it is a material evidence that this Gospel was circulating in Egypt already at the beginning of the second century and, as such, it contradicts those theories according to which John as not written until the second half of the second century.[22] This shows, among other things, the inadequacy of Baur's description of earliest Christianity. In fact, not only John but all New Testament documents are now generally assigned to the first century.[23] It is not altogether impossible, thus, that the Fourth Gospel was authored by an eyewitness to Jesus. In any case, it would not be necessarily removed from the world and setting it portrays.

Still, in the first half of the twentieth century several other archaeological discoveries in Palestine seemed to challenge some of the assumptions held at that time by most Johannine scholars. Attention to this matter was called by

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[21]See Jack Finegan, *Encountering New Testament Manuscripts: A Working Introduction to Textual Criticism* (London: SPCK, 1974), 85-90.

[22] "Because of the Rylands Papyrus (P52) particularly, John is generally thought to date no later than 110, and probably a decade or two earlier" (Smith, "Johannine Studies," 272-273). In recent years, some scholars have challenged the traditional date for P52: A. Schmidt argues for a date around 170 AD, plus or minus twenty-five years ("Zwei Anmerkungen zu P. Ryl. III 457," *APF* 35 [1989]: 11-12), and Brent Nongbri criticizes all attempts to establish a paleographic date for papyri like P52 and contends that the date range for this papyrus fragment must be extended to late second and even early third century ("The Use and Abuse of P52: Papyrological Pitfalls in the Dating of the Fourth Gospel," *HTR* 98 [2005]: 23-48). Most New Testament scholars, however, continue to favor the earlier dating. For references, see J. Ed Komoszewski, M. James Sawyer, and Daniel B. Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus: How Contemporary Skeptics Miss the Real Jesus and Mislead Popular Culture* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 280, n.4.

[23] E.g., Martin Hengel, "Eye-witness Memory and the Writing of the Gospels: Form Criticism, Community Tradition, and the Authority of the Authors," in *The Written Gospel*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl and Donald A. Hagner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 70-96.

archaeologist W. F. Albright in a number of publications between 1924 and 1956.[24] Among other things, Albright argued that the several topographical references in the Gospel could hardly have been made without some degree of familiarity with the Palestinian and particularly the Judean situation before the First Revolt (A.D. 66–70). In fact, the number of John's topographical references is rather unique within the New Testament. There are thirteen such references, and if details not mentioned in the Synoptics are included, the number increases to twenty. In a time when most interpreters believed John was fictional, these references were treated as symbolic rather than historical recollections.[25] According to Albright, however, considering the degree of the devastation created in Palestine and especially in Jerusalem by the Roman armies and also, the almost complete break in the continuity of Christian presence in those areas after the war, any correct data which could be validated archaeologically or topographically must have been carried into the Diaspora in oral form by Christians refugees.[26] Indeed, later Christian tradition does tell of the escape of some Christians from Jerusalem to Pella in Transjordan.[27]

In his 1956 article, Albright discusses only three examples of locations that were considered to have been positively identified by archaeology: the place where Pilate brought Jesus, which was called Lithostrōton in Greek and Gabbatha in Hebrew, that is, in Aramaic (19:13); "Aenon near Salim,"

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[24] W. F. Albright, "Some Observations Favoring the Palestinian Origin of the Gospel of John," *HTR* 17 (1924): 189-195; idem, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1940), 292-300; idem, *The Archaeology of Palestine* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1949), 239-248; idem, "Recent Discoveries in Palestine and the Gospel of John," in *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology: In Honour of Charles Harold Dodd*, ed. W. D. Davies and D. Daube (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 153-171.

[25] E.g., Norbert Krieger, "Fiktive Orte der Johannestaufe," ZNW 45 (1954): 121-123.

[26] Albright, "Recent Discoveries in Palestine," 156. Albright used the same argument for the numerous Aramaic words in the Gospel. Words such as *rabbi* ("my master") or the Greek equivalent *didaskalos* ("teacher"), as well as most personal names in John, such as *Maryam* (Mary), *Martâ* (Martha), *La'zar* (Lazarus), *Elisheba'* (Elisabeth), and *Shalôm* (Salome), were characteristic of the period of Herod the Great to A.D. 70 and became rather current in early Christian usage probably as reminiscences of oral tradition in Palestine before the First Revolt (ibid., 157-158).

[27] Eusebius, *Church History* 3.5.3.

where John the Baptist was conducting his baptismal work, "because there was much water there" (3:23); and Jacob's well, at Sychar, "a Samaritan city" (4:3-6), which he identified with Shechem.[28] Interestingly, the first two of these identifications, as well as the exact location of Sychar, would be contradicted by later archaeological discoveries. In an updated, comprehensive survey of the archaeological status of all topographical references in John, Urban C. von Wahlde indicates that of the twenty Johannine sites, sixteen have been identified with certainty. These are Bethsaida (1:44), Cana (2:1, 11; 4:46-54; 21:2), Capernaum (2:12; 4:46; 6:17, 24; the harbor, 6:24-25; the synagogue, 6:59), Jacob's well (4:4-6), Mount Gerizim (4:20), the location of Sychar (4:5), the Sheep Gate (5:2), the pool(s) of Bethesda (5:2), Tiberias (6:1, 23; 21:2), the pool of Siloam (9:1-9), Bethany near Jerusalem (11:1-17; 12:1-11), Ephraim (11:54), the Kidron Valley (18:1), the Praetorium (18:28, 33; 19:9), Golgotha (19:17-18, 20, 41), and the tomb of Jesus (19:41-42). Of the remaining four, two can be narrowed to within a relatively restricted area: the place in the temple precincts for the keeping of animals (2:13-16) and the Lithostrōton (19:13); and the other two are still highly controversial: Aenon near Salim (3:23) and Bethany beyond the Jordan (1:28; 10:40).[29]

In his concluding observations, von Wahlde makes two important statements. The first is that archaeology has confirmed the remarkable accuracy of the topographical information in John, even in face of the great number of details provided in some instances. As a matter of fact, he says, "it is precisely those places described in the greatest detail," as in the case of the pools of Bethesda, the place of crucifixion, and the location of Jesus' tomb, "that can be identified with the greatest certitude." The second statement is that there is "no credible evidence to suggest that any of the twenty sites is simply fictitious or symbolic." Though acknowledging the possibility of some sites having a secondary symbolic meaning, von Wahlde

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[28] Albright, "Recent Discoveries in Palestine," 158-160.

[29] Urban C. von Wahlde, "Archaeology and John's Gospel," in *Jesus and Archaeology*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 523-586. For his survey of the archaeological evidence of the three places mentioned by Albright, see specifically pages 555-556 (Aenon near Salim), 556-559 (Sychar), and 572-575 (the *Lithostrōton*). For the discussion of Bethany beyond the Jordan, a site whose identification remains highly controversial, see pages 528-533.

concludes that "the intrinsic historicity and accuracy of the references should be beyond doubt."[30] Despite the premature identifications endorsed by Albright, his main contention remains valid: John's early Palestinian and Judean topographical references must derive from Diaspora Christians in the Greco-Roman world, probably by means of orally conveyed tradition. This means that instead of a second-century creation completely detached from the time and places of the events it describes, the Gospel of John does contain good, ancient reminiscences, which necessarily favors the authenticity of its content.[31] As Paul N. Anderson declares, "Albright's archaeological contribution forced biblical scholars to consider again significant aspects of Johannine historicity, having been sidestepped by the previous century or more of critical scholarship."[32]

The years of the 1940s witnessed two other important archaeological discoveries bearing on the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel. The first occurred in late 1945, when thirteen fourth-century leather bound codices written in Coptic and containing no less than forty-nine treatises were discovered in a storage jar beneath a large boulder in Nag Hammadi, a site near the Egyptian village of al-Qacr. Since the codices probably reflect second-century traditions and combine Gnostic and early Christian elements, the whole question of the impact of Gnosticism upon the New Testament, particularly John, was reopened. It has been claimed that there is now indisputable evidence of Gnostic influence on the Fourth Gospel.[33] Careful investigation, however, has led most scholars to reject this hypothesis.[34] Simply put, the Nag Hammadi documents do not furnish any evidence at all of a pre-Christian Gnostic redeemer, as described by Bultmann and several others, that might have influenced the theology and literature of the Gentiles

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[30] Ibid., 583.

[31] Albright, "Recent Discoveries in Palestine," 158.

[32] Paul N. Anderson, "Aspects of Historicity in the Gospel of John," in *Jesus and Archaeology*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 590.

[33] E.g., Gesine Robinson, "The Trimorphic Protennoia and the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel," in *Gnosticism and the Early Christian World: In Honor of James M. Robinson*, ed. James E. Goehring, et al. (Sonoma: Polebridge, 1990), 37-50.

[34] See especially Craig A. Evans, *Word and Glory: On the Exegetical and Theological Background of John's Prologue,* JSNTSup 89 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 13-76.

churches, of which John's Gospel would be the finest example. If these documents allowed, for the first time, Bible scholars to encounter the Gnostics in their own words (and not only as they are depicted by early Christian heresiologists), they also witness to the distance that exists between Gnostic ideas and those of the New Testament. Arthur D. Nock says that the Nag Hammadi writings confirm what is already implicit in the church fathers, namely, that Gnosticism was indeed a second-century "Christian heresy with roots in speculative thought."[35]

The next and final discovery to help rescue the reputation of John's Gospel for historical reliability was the Dead Sea Scrolls. Discovered by accident in 1947 near Khirbet Qumran, close to the ruins of an ancient Jewish settlement, the Scrolls consist of a large number of biblical manuscripts, mostly fragmentary, and of other documents as well. Since they have been shown on the basis of paleography and carbon-14 tests to date from the period of Christian origins (200 B.C.–A.D. 70), these documents are of great interest not only to Old Testament research and the history of Judaism, but also to New Testament scholarship, particularly in relation to John's background. The Scrolls have made it plain that even before the Christian era there already existed in Palestine a literary setting in which Jewish, Greek, and even pre-Gnostic religious ideas were combined in a way that once was thought to be unique to John and of the second century onwards.

There are several examples in the Scrolls of the dualistic theological vocabulary found in Johannine and later Gnostic literature. These are mainly evident in the Manual of Discipline or Community Rule.[36] In cols. 3 and 4, for instance, we find words such as "world," "truth," "falsehood," "light," "darkness," "peace," "joy," and "eternal." These are typical of early Christian literature, particularly the Gospel of John. Also, expressions such as "practicing the truth," "the Spirit of Truth," "Prince of Light," "sons of light," "sons of darkness," "the light of life," "walk in the darkness," "the

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[35] Arthur D. Nock, "Gnosticism," in *Arthur Darby Nock: Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, 2 vols, ed. Zeph Stuart (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 2:956.

[36] The translation is from Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 98-117.

wrath of God," and "the works of God" are used in ways that are clearly reminiscent of John.[37]

Parallels and points of contact between the scrolls of Qumran and John are numerous, and this has been decisive in establishing the fundamental Jewishness of the Fourth Gospel. It is no longer necessary, nor correct, to appeal to an eventual second-century Hellenistic or Gnostic milieu to explain the distinctiveness of this Gospel. Though the conceptual and theological differences between John and Qumran should not be overlooked, the similarities in vocabulary and images are of great importance in determining the nature of Johannine tradition: it is now possible to demonstrate that this tradition is much closer to that of Christianity itself than it had previously been thought possible.[38]

Recent Johannine Scholarship

The Dead Sea Scrolls prompted what became known as "the new look on the Fourth Gospel." This is precisely the title of an article published originally in 1959 by John A. T. Robinson, in which he questioned five old presuppositions related to the reliability of Johannine tradition that had mostly underlain the Fourth Gospel research in the preceding fifty years.[39] The presuppositions were so widely accepted, the consensus so strong that Robinson could even speak of what he termed "critical orthodoxy."[40] By explicitly referring to the Scrolls and other archaeological findings that vindicated John's knowledge of the topography and institutions of Palestine prior to the Jewish war, he spoke of what appeared to him to be straws in the wind, but which he was inclined to take seriously, because all of the straws

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[37] See further James H. Charlesworth, "A Critical Comparison of the Dualism in 1QS 3:13-4:26 and the 'Dualism' Contained in the Gospel of John," in *John and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, enl. ed., ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 76-106.

[38] Stephen S. Smalley, *John: Evangelist and Interpreter*, 2d ed., NTP (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 35.

[39] John A. T. Robinson, "The New Look on the Fourth Gospel," in *Studia Evangelica: Papers Presented to the International Congress on "The Four Gospels in 1957" Held at Christ Church, Oxford, 1957*, ed. Kurt Aland et al., TU 73 (Berlin: Akademie, 1959), 338-350; reprinted in John A. T. Robinson, *Twelve New Testament Studies*, SBT (Naperville: Allenson, 1962), 94-106.

[40] Robinson, *Twelve New Testament Studies*, 94.

were blowing in the same direction.[41] Then, at the end of the article he expressed his conviction that Johannine tradition is not the result of a later development, but goes back to the earliest days of Christianity.[42] So the question whether John's material is historically reliable or theologically conditioned, that is, whether the author should be regarded as a witness to the Jesus of history or to the Christ of faith only, Robinson's answer was clear: "Because he [John] is the New Testament writer who, theologically speaking, takes history more seriously than any other, he has at least the right to be heard—on the history as well as on the theology."[43]

So, the stage was set for more concrete actions concerning the issue of history in John. The first practical results, though rather imperfect, came in 1968, when J. Louis Martyn published his acclaimed little book on the redaction of the Fourth Gospel. The Nag Hammadi documents and the Dead Sea Scrolls helped to restore the essential Jewishness of this Gospel and, by means of redaction analysis, Martyn tried to locate the proper historical life-setting that could best explain John's most striking literary feature, which is the fierce hostility between Jesus and the Jews.[44] For Martyn, the reason for that is because the evangelist and his community were engaged in a serious and even violent exchange with a local synagogue, from which they separated.[45] The separation would have occurred near the end of the first century when the Jewish religious leaders excluded the Christians from

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., 106.

[43] Ibid., 102. Robinson was not the first to raise anew the issue of John's historicity. In the Sarum Lectures, delivered in 1954-1955 at the University of Oxford, C. H. Dodd had already spoken of the new situation, using arguments not much unlike those used by Robinson. A few years later, Dodd's lectures were expanded in a book titled *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963).

[44] The term *ioudaios* occurs 194 times in the New Testament; while it occurs in the Synoptics only 16 times, in John it appears 71, mostly in the plural form. In his definitive study, Urban C. von Wahlde concludes that out of the 71 occurrences, 38 are used in a hostile sense ("The Johannine 'Jews': A Critical Survey," *New Testament Studies* 28 [1982]: 41 [cf. 57, nn. 68, 69]). The only book that parallels John in both number of occurrences (79 times) and hostility is Acts.

[45] See J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

public worship by adding a curse against them, the Birkat ha-Minim (Benediction concerning Heretics), to the synagogue liturgy.[46]

While few have accepted Martyn's thesis in all of its details, virtually all Johannine interpreters became persuaded that despite being profoundly theological, John's theology is not floating in the air, so to speak, totally isolated from or unaffected by the *realia* of history.[47] This was indeed a huge advance in relation to previous research, and it is here that lies Martyn's main contribution to Johannine studies, though he remained rather skeptical about the historicity of the Gospel story as a whole. It is true that he suggested that the Gospel preserves two historical levels, that of Jesus and that of the evangelist, but, in line with classical redaction criticism which was still under the influence of a strong anti-supernaturalistic view of reality, he actually believed that the traditions about Jesus have been so thoroughly reshaped and rewritten in face of the prevailing circumstances at the evangelist's time that the historical figure of that early first-century Galilean can hardly be glimpsed through the Johannine lens.[48]

After Martyn, and still within the atmosphere of excitement created by redaction criticism, a relatively new issue started receiving an incredible and disproportional amount of attention within Johannine scholarship—the community which supposedly was responsible for the Gospel's origin. There was, therefore, a complete shift of focus away from the person and identity of the evangelist to his community. The attempts to reconstruct the historical and theological developments of that community, however, were so diverse and speculative that the whole enterprise soon began to crumble. Martyn himself compared the avalanche of reconstructions, including his own, to a genie which had been let out of a bottle and which was "not proving easy to

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[46] For a summary of Martyn's position, see Robert Kysar, *The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel: An Examination of Contemporary Scholarship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1975), 149-156, and esp. D. Moody Smith, "The Contribution of J. Louis Martyn to the Understanding of the Gospel of John," in *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John in Honor of J. Louis Martyn* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 275-294.

[47] See D. Moody Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John*, NTT (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 48-56.

[48] For a helpful discussion on the history and character of redaction criticism, see Grant R. Osborne, "Redaction Criticism," in *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues*, rev. ed., ed. David A. Black and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 128-149.

control."[49] After two or so decades, dissatisfaction over the value of historical-critical approaches caused Johannine scholarship to follow two opposite directions. On one hand, several new interpretive methodologies were adopted, such as sociological and literary criticisms. The latter, for example, is essentially a postmodern and reader-oriented approach that attempts to interpret the text without appealing to anything that lies outside or beyond it (e.g., its historical setting) and assuming its unity against all forms of source and redaction-critical techniques.[50] This means that the old questions of authorship and historicity lose their relevance altogether. On the other hand, and in part because of the same archaeological findings reported above, the issue of history in John was reopened and started to be tackled again in a much more straight and objective way than ever before.

Even with redaction criticism still on the rise, Robinson's "new look" was already increasingly impacting contemporary Johannine scholarship on several fronts. In 1966-1970, Raymond E. Brown published his influential two-volume commentary on the Fourth Gospel, in which he took a relatively conservative approach on questions such as authorship and historicity.[51]

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[49]See Thomas L. Brodie, *The Quest for the Origin of John's Gospel: A Source-Oriented Approach* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 21 (for a summary of the main reconstructions up until the early 1990s, see 15-21).

[50] For an introduction to literary criticism, see esp. Jeffrey A. D. Weima, "Literary Criticism," in *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues*, rev. ed., ed. David A. Black and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 150-169. A more detailed discussion (with helpful examples) of this and other recent approaches to the New Testament can be found in parts two and three of Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes, eds., *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application*, rev. and exp. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999). The most recent bibliography of Johannine research, providing ample references to sociological and literary studies, is Watson E. Mills, comp., *The Gospel of John*, vol. 4, *Bibliographies for Biblical Research: New Testament Series*, ed. Watson E. Mills, 21 vols. (Lewiston: Mellen, 1995).

[51] Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 2 vols. AB 29-29A (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966-1970). See also his earlier essays, "Incidents That Are Units in the Synoptic Gospels but Dispersed in St. John," CBQ 23 (1961): 143-160; "The Problem of Historicity in John," CBQ 24 (1962): 1-14. In his *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (New York: Paulist, 1979), 33-34, Brown rejected his previous position that the author of the Gospel was John the apostle, but even late in his life, in his massive *The Death of the Messiah* (2 vols. [New York: Doubleday, 1994]), he remained virtually confident as in his earlier

Much of the same can be said about several other important commentaries which were published around the 1970s. Charles K. Barrett, Rudolf Schnackenburg, and Barnabas Lindars all assumed what can be described as an intermediate position between widespread skepticism and complete historicity. They rejected, for example, the idea that the Beloved Disciple was the author or even a person who could have supplied first-hand historical information, but were willing to accept that whoever was responsible for this Gospel had at his disposal at least some reliable traditions.[52]

Two twin areas of research in which long-standing positions also soon began to change had to do with the genre of the Fourth Gospel and its relation with the Synoptics. Different as it is, John is not a theological treatise per se, but a Gospel, that is, a narrative of Jesus' ministry, and as such it stands together with Mark, Matthew, and Luke. This is what it claims for itself (20:30-31), and this is what it is. Like the Synoptics, it starts with the appearance of John the Baptist and ends with the passion narrative, and everything is within a chronological framework which seems much more complete and accurate than theirs. Already in 1969, Käsemann was impressed by the fact that "John felt himself under constraint to compose a Gospel rather than letters or a collection of sayings" and found this to be detrimental to some of Bultmann's arguments. "For it seems to me," he said, "that if one has no interest in the historical Jesus, then one does not write a Gospel, but, on the contrary, finds the Gospel form inadequate."[53] Moreover,

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commentary in finding historical elements in most of John's passages.

[52] Charles K. Barrett, 100-144; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 3 vols., trans. Kevin Smyth, et al. (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968-1982), 1:75-104; Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, NCB (London: Oliphants, 1972), 28-34. Recent studies representing similar intermediate position include George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, WBC 36 (Waco: Word, 1987; 2d. ed. [Nashville: Nelson], 1999), lxxiii-lxxv; D. Moody Smith, "Historical Issues and the Problem of John and the Synoptics," in *From Jesus to John*, ed. Martinus C. de Boer, JSNTSup 84 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 252-267; idem, *John*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 24-27; R. Alan Culpepper, "The AMHN, AMHN Sayings in the Gospel of John," in *Perspectives on John: Methods and Interpretation in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Robert B. Sloan and Mikeal C. Parson (Lewinton: Mellen, 1993), 57-101; idem, *John, The Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend*, SPNT (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 56-88.

[53] Ernst Käsemann, *New Testament Questions for Today*, trans. W. J. Montague (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 41.

John's author claims to be a direct eyewitness of at least some of the events he records (21:24; 19:34-35; cf. 1:14), which strongly emphasizes the importance for him of Jesus as a historical figure. In 1 John, he is even more explicit on this (cf. 1:1-3; 2:18-25; 4:1-3; 5:6-9), and the Epistle would make little or no sense at all without the Gospel.

This led to a complete reevaluation of the traditional consensus that John was dependent on the Synoptics, or, in the case of Bultmann, that John was dependent on a signs source and a passion source.[54] As early as 1938, P. Gardner-Smith had already argued that John was written independently from the Synoptics,[55] a thesis that was taken even further by C. H. Dodd, a couple of decades later, and which was congenial with the historical value of John. After an exhaustive analysis of the Gospel, Dodd concluded it was highly probable that the fourth evangelist employed an ancient (oral) tradition independent of the other Gospels and deserving serious consideration as a contribution to the knowledge of the historical facts concerning Jesus Christ.[56] Independence, however, is not in itself equivalent to historicity, as dependence does not necessarily make a composition fictional. So, even if it can be demonstrated that John did know and used one (usually Mark) or more of the other Gospels,[57] in view of the cumulative evidence this can no longer detract from John as containing genuine tradition.

The fact is that, in recent years and as an integral part of the Third Quest for the historical Jesus, Johannine scholarship has reached a point in which the historiographical character of the Beloved Disciple's testimony is argued for as openly, and powerfully, as never before. This has been done, for example, by scholars such as Martin Hengel, James H. Charlesworth, and especially Richard Bauckham.[58] Though they don't come to the point of

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[54] See Ashton, 45-50. For additional information on source criticism on John, see Gerard S. Sloyan, *What Are They Saying about John?* (New York: Paulist, 1991), 28-49.

[55] P. Gardner-Smith, *Saint John and the Synoptic Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938).

[56] Dodd, 423.

[57] For a comprehensive survey of positions on the issue of John's relationship with the Synoptics since Gardner-Smith and Dodd, see Smith, *John among the Gospels*, 45-194.

[58] E.g., Martin Hengel, *The Johannine Question* (London: SCM, 1989), subsequently expanded as *Die Johanneische Frage: Ein Lösungsversuch*, WUNT 67 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1993); James H. Charlesworth, *The Beloved Disciple: Whose Witness Validates the Gospel of John?* (Valley Forge: Trinity, 1995); Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses:*

identifying the Beloved Disciple as the apostle John,[59] their works signal an important trend in the Fourth Gospel's contemporary research,[60] namely, the rehabilitation of John as a source for the historical-Jesus quest.

This trend culminated with the establishment, in 2002, of the John, Jesus, and History Project at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meetings. The project, which is now in its third triennium and has raised a considerable amount of attention within Johannine and Jesus scholarship, is intended to examine foundational questions about both the nature of the Fourth Gospel and its historicity. A number of the most significant papers delivered at the sessions by leading Johannine scholars have already been collected in two volumes which from now on will certainly be reference points for those interested in the subject. [61] The voices are still not speaking in unisonous–they probably never will–but it is possible to detect significant elements of convergence among the various discussions, such as more attention to John's particular type of historiographical memory and the way he understands history, a considerable departure from source-critical analysis, a continuous interest on the issue of John's relationship with the Synoptics, a fresh approach to the history-theology debate, a call for

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The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); idem, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).

[59] While Charlesworth argues that the Beloved Disciple was the apostle Thomas (*The Beloved Disciple*, 225-287), both Hengel and Bauckham think that he was the elusive John the Elder of the well-known Papias' citation preserved by Eusebius (*Church History* 3.39.4). According to them, still as a very young lad and through the ministry of John the Baptist, this John was attracted by the activity of Jesus and became one of his most faithful disciples, though he was not one of the Twelve (Hengel, *The Johannine Question*, 109-135; Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, 73-91).

[60] For additional, specialized studies on specific passages and issues dealing with John's historicity, see Craig L. Blomberg, "John and Jesus," in *The Face of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research*, ed. Scot McKnight and Grant R. Osborne (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 220-224, and the several essays in Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser, eds., *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

[61] Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, and Tom Thatcher, eds., *John, Jesus, and History*, vol. 1, *Critical Appraisals of Critical Views*, SBLSymS 44 (Atlanta: SBL, 2007); idem, *John, Jesus, and History*, vol. 2, *Aspects of Historicity in the Fourth Gospel*, SBLECL 2 (Atlanta, SBL, 2009).

interdisciplinary investigations, as well as for a more nuanced approach to Jesus studies. Even though the essays still do not provide too many clear answers, there is a definite effort to put John's Gospel in its rightful place concerning the quest for the historical Jesus.[62] And this is indeed one of the most significant moves in modern Johannine research, whatever the long-run results may be.[63]

In point of fact, it seems very forced logic to conclude that because John differs from the Synoptics and is mostly theological in its tone it cannot be historical in its character. From the hermeneutical standpoint, the either/or approach is absolutely unjustifiable, and if the results of archaeology are not confined to the meanders of specialized books or the penumbra of museum rooms, one can even venture to say that such an approach is actually mistaken. It is puzzling, ponders Anderson, that though having more archaeological and topographical material than all three Synoptics combined, there are still those who consider John to be entirely non-historical. In this case, how to account for that material? Where did it come from and why was it included? Was it only for rhetorical effect or to lend a sense of realism to the narrative?[64] One thing that needs to be said out loud is that the attitude which takes that material as a positive sign of the character and origin of the Johannine tradition should not be so quickly dismissed as a misuse of critical sensibility.[65]

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[62] "John has come back," says D. Moody Smith in his article ("John: A Source for Jesus Research?" *John, History, and Jesus,* 1:177).

[63] A more complete report on the current trends in Johannine scholarship can be found in Klaus Scholtissek, "The Johannine Gospel in Recent Research," in *The Face of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research,* ed. Scot McKnight and Grant R. Osborne (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 444-472. See also the several essays in Tom Thatcher, ed., *What We Have Heard From the Beginning: The Past, Present, and Future of Johannine Studies* (Waco: Baylor, 2007).

[64] Anderson, "Aspects of Historicity in the Gospel of John," 596.

[65] It should be remembered that there are also several other lines of evidence for the historicity of John. In addition to topographical references, Anderson lists rhetorical claims to firsthand knowledge, aspects of spatiality and topographical incidentals, aspects of personal familiarity, chronological references and the fact of empirical detail (597-613). Concluding his article, he argues that "while much of John is theological, to claim that all of its content—or even most of it—must be ascribed to canons of a historicity and concoction is more than the authentically critical scholar will want to claim" ("Aspects of Historicity in the Gospel of John," 618).

Conclusion

Johannine research is deeply indebted to archaeology. The theological and philosophical approach of post-Enlightenment scholars, who only seldom applied historical analysis to the Fourth Gospel, was severely crippled by a number of artifactual and topographical findings. Such findings called for a complete reassessment of the problem of history in this Gospel and gave rise to more objective discussions of several related issues. Though the archaeologist's shovel will never be able to demonstrate the veracity of statements such as "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (1:14), "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (3:16), and "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (20:31), or episodes such as the miracle at Cana (2:1-11), the feeding of the five thousand (6:1-15), and the resurrection of Lazarus (11:17-44), it has helped more than anything else to put John's Jewishness, antiquity, and even historical likeliness on a firm foundation.

That this Gospel was not written later than the turn of the first century can hardly be disputed. With regard to its conceptual background, scholars who still operate within the constraints of the religio-historical school, thus arguing for Hellenism rather than Judaism as the main source of John's ideas, are admittedly few.[66] In relation to authorship, it is true that many interpreters still refrain themselves from identifying the Beloved Disciple as John the Son of Zebedee, but it is at least frankly acknowledged today that "there is always the chance that the apostle John may have been in some way 'author' of the Gospel we traditionally call 'of John,'" as Francis J. Moloney says. He adds: "It is arrogant to rule any possibility out of court."[67] As for

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[66]A classical example is Helmut Koester, who continues to explain John's miracle stories and typical discourses as gnosticizing interpretation of cult and tradition within the Johannine community (*From Jesus to the Gospels: Interpreting the New Testament in Its Context* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007], 105-121).

[67] Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, SP 4 (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1998), 8. The traditional view that the Beloved Disciple was John the apostle is still maintained by a considerable number of recent scholars. E.g., John A. T. Robinson, *The Priority of John*, ed. J. F. Coakley (London: SCM, 1985), 93-122; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 68-81; Gary M. Burge, *Interpreting the Gospel of John*, GNTE (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 37-52; Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 672-683; E. Earle Ellis, *The Making of the New Testament Documents* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 143-146; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 2 vols. (Peabody:

the historical reliability, though practically all scholars now agree that behind John's material lie some good traditions, most of them continue to hold that a larger amount of that material still proves more suspicious than not.[68] However, as Craig L. Blomberg remarks, this is more the result of a presupposition that simply rejects any form of supernaturalism than the conclusion of a sustained argument.[69] And this is where the discussion ends, for in the final account one's reaction to this Gospel will always be bound to an individual decision, not so much to the weight of evidence (cf. 12:37; 20:29).

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Hendrickson, 2003), 1:82-104; Colin G. Kruse, *John*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 24-30; Andreas J. Köstenberger, John, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 6-8; Paul N. Anderson, *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus: Modern Foundations Reconsidered* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 8-15.

[68] In his recently published commentary, Andrew T. Lincoln states rather emphatically: "The Fourth Gospel, like many other ancient biographies, is a narrative which contains a substratum of core events from the tradition with substantial claims to reliability, but one which is now shaped by an interpretive superstructure which contains a considerable amount of embellishment, including some legendary or fictive elements" (*The Gospel According to Saint John*, BNTC [Peabody: Hendrickson, 2005], 46-47). For even more radical skepticism in relation to John's historicity, see Maurice Casey, *Is John's Gospel True?* (London: Routledge, 1996), and the twin volumes by the Jesus Seminar: Robert Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1993); Robert Funk and the Jesus Seminar, *The Acts of Jesus: The Search for the Authentic Deeds of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998).

[69] Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel: Issues and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 283.